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CHERRY POND



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CAMPING
AT
CHERRY POND

By
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Camping at Cherry Pond

WE were out of meat. We were not in imminent danger of starvation, nor indeed of hunger, but were reduced to what might be called a vegetable diet, and not a great variety of that. Bige and I discussed the situation while we ate our frugal evening meal of flapjacks, maple syrup, and onions. We had eaten onions, syrup, and flapjacks for luncheon, and syrup, onions, and flapjacks for breakfast that same day. The last of our stock of bacon had been consumed twenty-four hours earlier, and the last of our eggs had served as part of breakfast on the morning of the previous day. Our fresh meat had disappeared five days before, and the potato bag was empty. We had some coffee and plenty of spring water. The

flapjacks were good, but we were not quite happy. There was a lot of sameness in our diet, which was far from agreeable, and we now were considering ways and means.

I suppose it is due to the perversity of the human animal that he craves what is sometimes called a "balanced ration." We were both fond of flapjacks, and likewise of onions. There is nothing quite so satisfying as onions, cooked over and eaten by the camp fire ; but onions three times a day, and day after day—well, I suppose it would have been just as bad if we had been sentenced to eat ice cream for a steady diet. I seem to recall that we had, in our Sunday-school days, the authority of the Good Book for the statement that the Israelites went on a strike because they were obliged to eat quail three times a day for a long while.

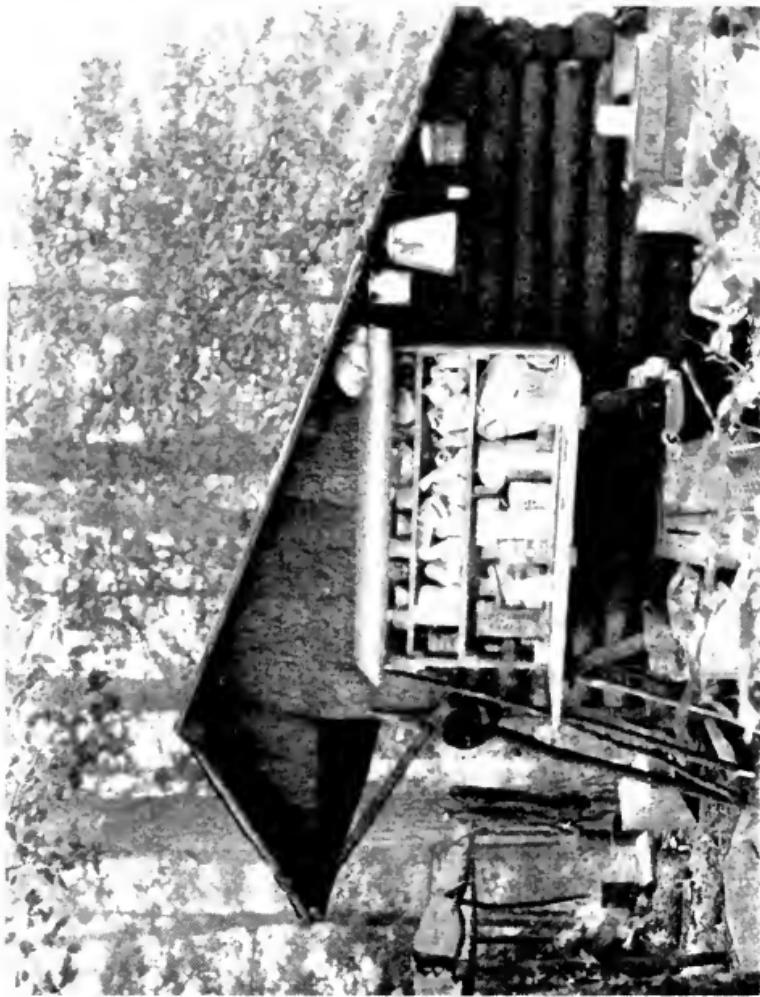
Bige and I were living at the Cherry Pond Camp. We had gone over there to hunt deer, and had taken in with us, ten days previously, what we considered a good supply of food; but then, we had counted on shooting a deer and expected to have venison to add to our cuisine. Of course we could have gone back to Brown's hotel and gotten some more food, but Deerland Lodge was ten miles away; besides, the people there would have laughed at us if we had returned empty-handed. We were expected to bring "meat" back with us, but luck had been against us.

There were plenty of fish in Cherry Pond. We had caught them there many times, but at the time of which I write the season was closed for both speckled and lake trout, and, moreover, we had brought no fishing tackle, so a fish diet was out of the discussion.

It was early October, and the deer-hunting season had opened on the first day of the month. We had come to hunt deer, but we had no thought of taking a mean advantage of the deer or of violating the game law by hunting him at night along the shores of the pond with a jack light. That would have been too easy, and in our opinion little short of murder. We proposed to be sporty and practice only the "still-hunting" method. That would give the deer long odds and, so to speak, a running chance for his life. Under the prevailing conditions the chances were indeed about twenty to one in his favor.

In still hunting one must sneak through the woods, making no sound and as little motion as possible. Preferably one should also hunt "up wind," but this is not always possible. The

The Cherry Pond Camp



deer has been provided with a pair of very large ears capable of collecting the sound made by a breaking twig many rods away; and his sense of smell is so keen as to telegraph to his brain the human scent and warn him of the approach of his hereditary enemy long before he is within range of vision. It is also the habit of the deer, when lying down, to take such a position that he can keep his eye on his own back track, while he has in effect "his ear to the ground."

At this time the leaves had just begun to fall, and there had been no rain for many days, so when one walked through the woods the leaves rustled, and dried twigs and branches snapped, making the forest "noisy."

There were many deer living in the vicinity of Cherry Pond. We had seen tracks and other signs of their pres-

ence, but on the few occasions when we saw a deer it was usually only the flash of his white tail as he jumped from behind a clump of bushes and disappeared behind a rock or other screen. Twice we took snap shots, and in each instance the bullet, we found, was imbedded in a tree trunk that the deer had succeeded in placing between the gun and himself at the first running jump. I had also sat many hours on logs watching runways while Bige tramped around a hill or over a mountain to drive a deer past my watch station. On one occasion when I heard a deer coming and was all ready to shoot, he evidently suspected danger, crossed over to another parallel runway, and passed without coming into view.

We had traveled many miles in our hunt, had been over Panther Moun-

tain and Eagle Mountain, had been up Beaver River Valley, and had visited Pickwocket Pond and Muskrat City. We had hunted carefully and patiently, but had each night gone back to camp without meat, and the situation was becoming serious.

Cherry Pond, so named because of the quantities of wild cherries that grow near it, was one of our favorite camping places, and we had spent more or less time there every year for the past fifteen years, both during the fishing and hunting seasons. Many a fine trout has found his ultimate destiny in our frying pan over the Cherry Pond camp fire.

Bige and I had built an open log camp there: one of the type called a "lean-to." It is so named because it leans to or against nothing. In other words, the camp has three sides, a



The Dining Room

sloping roof, an overhanging or projecting hood, and a fireplace built of stone in front. This type of camp can be made very comfortable except in cold winter weather, and in it one can be sure of plenty of fresh air. Some of the enclosed log cabins we have built are not so well ventilated and are liable to be close and stuffy.

We had a lot of fun in building this camp. It was substantially made, and with a few repairs to the roof has sheltered us for twelve years.

The first step in building a camp is to look for a spring of good pure water. In this case, after searching for several days and failing to find one, we selected a spot where the lay of the land indicated that a spring ought to be and dug for it. We found about three feet below the surface a vein of ice water that has never failed in the driest season.

Next, we selected a spot on top of a knoll about fifty feet above the surface of the pond and two hundred feet away from it, where we staked out our foundation. This elevation put us above the fog and damp air which settle down on the water at night.

Then we proceeded to make a set of drawings and specifications such as would be made in building a house. The logs and roof timbers were cut and fitted to specification before they were carried to position. The ground plan was twelve by eight feet. The ridge pole was nine feet high. The hood projected two feet, and was seven feet above ground. The walls were made of spruce logs, and were five feet high. The bottom log was ten inches in diameter; others graduated in size up to five inches at the top. Rafters were placed four inches apart; these

and other roof timbers were made of spruce saplings two to three inches in diameter; and the roof and gable ends were covered with tar-paper, the roof projecting one foot beyond the walls all around to keep the outside of logs dry. Cracks between the logs were calked with dry moss.

On the ground, across the front, we placed a log ten inches in diameter, and another of the same size parallel to it at the rear. Across these two logs from front to rear we placed birch saplings one and one-half inches in diameter at the butt. These poles were selected with some care to have them straight, and they were placed one-half inch apart, butts to the front; and a single wire nail fastened each pole to the front log and kept it in position. The small ends of poles were left free to slide on the rear log when

bent. On top of this birch gridiron we made our bed of balsam boughs. The result was as comfortable a spring bed as one can buy at a furniture house.

We built a cupboard at one end of the shack in which to store our food, and it was eaten up by porcupines and rebuilt the second time before we learned to cover the boards with tin. Also, after one table had been chewed up by the animals, we suspended the new one with wire from the roof of the camp on leaving, and since then have found it in good condition when we returned.

The camp afforded sleeping space for three or four persons. On occasions when we had several guests we would set up a tent in the back yard.

From time to time we made improvements; for example, we built a pavilion to cover the dining table so

that in rainy weather we were not obliged to eat our meals on the bed.

One day during the hunt we came upon signs of bear only a few rods from the camp, and the tracks and other evidence of his presence were fresh. He had not been gone more than a few minutes when we arrived. The black bear of our forests is very fond of cherries and other fruits. The wild cherries of these woods are of a superior variety. They are much larger and sweeter than the ordinary type of choke (or pin) cherry. They are black and have a bitter-sweet flavor. We often eat them, but they are best used in making "cherry bounce."

The bear will gorge himself on these cherries, and he is no conservationist. He climbs a tree if it is a large one and breaks off all the branches. If it happens to be a small tree, he will tear it

down and break it limb from limb, or he may pull it up by the roots, thus destroying the crop for another year. The bear is a typical American.

On another day we decided to suspend hunting operations and go over to Otter Pond, about a mile away, to inspect the lumber operations of a colony of beavers that live there; so we left our guns in camp, and Bige carried a boat over the trail, while I took my camera.

Just as we emerged from the woods we saw on the shore of Otter Pond, quietly browsing and about seventy-five yards away, a big buck deer having five prongs on each horn.

“Gosh!” said Bige.

We looked at him some minutes before he discovered our presence and loped off into the woods. It was as fine a shot as we shall ever have if we hunt



The Beaver House

the balance of our lives, but our guns were a mile away.

While paddling across the pond and near an island we heard a squeaking sound such as a lot of mice might make. Stopping the boat to listen, we soon saw, on a partly sunken log, six young mink. They were about the size of kittens when a week old. We sat quietly watching them a few minutes, when the mother mink came to the surface with a trout about five inches long in her mouth. She swam to the log and laid the fish on it, when the little ones scrambled for it, tearing it into shreds in a jiffy. They fought over the last scrap while the mother mink dove under the water again, and we continued across the pond to the beaver house which was on the opposite shore.

This beaver house was made of

sticks of wood of varying size fastened together by mud. It was cone-shaped and placed on the bank with one edge in the water. It was about fifteen feet in diameter at the base and seven feet high at the center. There were five separate canals or ditches sunk below the bottom of the pond, all entering the house under its base and about four feet below the surface of the water. These allowed the beaver entrance and exit when the ice was very thick in winter.

We stopped our boat alongside, pounded on the roof with the paddle and waited for a response. We heard a murmur of beaver talk inside, and in two or three minutes there came a sudden splash directly behind us and a shower of water poured over my head and down the back of my neck. The grandfather beaver, the largest

of his tribe, had come out through one of the cellar passages, under the boat, had come to the surface behind us, had lifted his tail, which was as broad and flat as Bige's paddle, and slapped the water with it, throwing spray at least six feet into the air. When I caught sight of him he was in the act of diving, but he presently came to the surface again, about fifty feet away, and started swimming toward the opposite shore. I wanted his portrait for my collection, so we went paddling after him. Five or six times we got near enough to focus the camera on him and press the button at just the instant when he slapped the water and dove under. The result was a half-dozen pictures of fountains but no beaver.

We were now a half-mile away from the house up the pond and for the first



A Beaver Fountain

time realized that we were victims of a perfidious beaver trick. His sole purpose was, clearly, to allure us as far away from his house and his family as possible, and he had won.

About fifteen years previously a fire had burned over nearly a hundred acres of forest on the northern shore of Otter Pond, and this was now grown up with poplar and white-birch saplings. The bark of both these trees is used as food by the beavers, and they were now busily at work cutting down, clearing away, and storing for winter use this second growth of timber.

Unlike the bear, Brother Beaver is very thorough and economical in his operations. Nothing is wasted. He cuts down a tree with his chisel-shaped teeth, takes out a chip just such as comes from a lumberman's ax, cuts

the tree into approximately four-foot lengths, trims out the branches, and carries away every scrap of it, even the small twigs. Nothing is left where the tree fell but stump and chips. What is not required for immediate use is piled up *under water* to keep the bark soft and fresh for winter consumption. And when he has peeled and eaten the bark from a stick, he saves that stick for use in enlarging his house or in repairing his dam.

At one corner of the pond was a swampy place through which a system of canals had been dug, down which the lumber might be floated to the open water on the way to the storage place. There were also roadways on the hillside, cleared and smooth, down which hundreds of sticks had been dragged to the water. About ten acres had been thoroughly cleared, and



The Dutch Oven

there were signs of activity on every hand, but most of the actual work was done at night. The beaver was the pioneer civil engineer of the American continent. At Otter Pond he had repaired and rebuilt a dam which had been used by a lumber company twenty years before.

To return to the discussion at our evening meal of the meat famine: Bige said that if we would get up early in the morning, long before sunrise, and go across the pond and up into the mouth of Fox River, we should find deer feeding there on the yellow pond lilies and button grass. We would have to find a hiding place before it got light, as the deer seldom stayed long at the water after sunrise.

So in the chill and shivery hours of the following morning we were on our way, I in the bow of the boat headed

forward with my Winchester across my knees, and Bige operating a "still paddle" at the stern. By this method the paddle is not lifted out of the water; it is merely turned in the water so that the sharp edge of the blade is presented on moving it forward and the broad side is against the water on pushing it back. No ripple is made, or other sound, and the boat moves forward like a ghost through the darkness. A dense fog had settled down near the water, but it was clear overhead.

Groping along the opposite shore through the fog, we made our way finally into the mouth of Fox River and immediately heard a great splashing and sloshing just ahead. It sounded as if a lot of cattle might be wading across the stream, but we could see nothing but fog. Bige whispered from

the other end of the boat: "There's a whole herd of them; pick the one with the biggest horns." I cocked my rifle so as to be ready for a quick shot, while Bige pulled the boat up along shore behind an overhanging wild-rose bush, and we waited with nerve and muscle tense. The splashing continued for what seemed a long time. Finally the rising sun crept over the hilltop and the fog rolled slowly up like a proscenium curtain in a theater and disclosed, at a distance of about thirty yards, a doe standing in the shallow water and quietly eating button grass, while two spotted fawns were playing tag, racing up and down, splashing water in every direction. With head and tail erect they would run about, kicking up their heels and snorting like a lot of calves at play in a barnyard.



One of the Partridges

This was a show worth the price of admission, and we sat and watched it for fully ten minutes, when a shifting breeze apparently carried our scent to the mother, who instantly sounded a note of warning, and the family party quickly disappeared through the brush into the tall timber, and we paddled back across Cherry Pond to our breakfast of flapjacks, syrup, and onions.

As we approached the landing place it occurred to me that the hammer of my gun was still up, and that the gun had not been lifted from my knees during the entire performance. As I let the hammer down and removed the cartridge from the barrel, I was conscious of a sense of relief that nothing had occurred to disturb the pleasant relations of the happy family.

After breakfast I went over on the Wolf Mountain tote road and shot four

fine fat partridges. That night we had roast partridge for dinner. Have you ever eaten partridge that had been roasted in a Dutch oven before a camp fire? Well, say! "Jes take and have 'em stuffed with onions, baste 'em well, and roast 'em brown with a lot of gravy."

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